

To what extent did propaganda influence the victory of the “Red Army”
on Stalingrad battle during the Second World War?

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1892 words

Identification and evaluation of sources:

This research will focus on the question: “To what extent did propaganda influence the victory of the “Red Army” on Stalingrad battle during the Second World War?” and also will cover some major purposes, tactics and examples of propaganda used by USSR. This investigation will explore the time period of the Second World War, not only on the duration of Stalingrad battle as there are some cases that contribute to the topic. The decision to take this time period allows getting a full picture of the influence of the propaganda on not only soldier but civilians as well.

The first source is the propaganda poster painted in 1941 by three propaganda makers: Pevzner, Vlasov and Shishmareva. This is the primary source, what makes it reliable as it was designed and painted during the time period. Another advantage of this poster is that the authors were popular and trustable propaganda makers, so the poster represents the standard of USSR’s propaganda. However, it still has some limitations like the creators did not provide any description of the poster so the main idea of it can be misunderstood. Another limitation is that the authors could be pressured by some officials and the poster might not comprise the original idea of authors. This source was created for the purpose of illustrating the enemy as a stupid animal, as Germany here is presented as an angry gorilla-like beast with a pistol and an axe. Also, the propaganda emphasizes that USSR is fighting against the beast. The information it gives and the slogan “Death to fascism” shows one of the main purposes of propaganda- representing enemy in a bad way. This source is important for the topic as it illustrates the principle of manipulation of soldiers and citizens by propagandists.



“Death to fascism” by Pevzner, Vlasov and Shishmareva(1941).

Second source is another propaganda poster, made in 1941 by V. Koretsky. It is again a primary source and it was created to represent a soviet soldier as a strong man who did his work properly so to motivate the soldiers to beat Germany down alike the person on the poster. In the poster a soldier has a medal that would inspire people to fight bravely to gain alike medals.

On the background a destroyed German tank was drawn, it means that a Soviet soldier is capable of destroying a tank by himself. The source can be trustable as it was made during the war and

by a well-known propaganda maker. However, it still has the same limitations as the first source: the message can be misunderstood and the author could be pressured. This source will be helpful for the research as it represents the different type of propaganda that inspires people to fight the enemy like the soldier on the poster. It also reveals that destroying enemy tanks is not that hard and it is a honorable thing to do. This source is important for the topic as it illustrates the principle of manipulation of soldiers and citizens by propagandists.



"Did a pretty good work" by V. Koretsky(1941).

Investigation:

The battle of Stalingrad was truly a very significant moment in the history of the Second World War because it was a great defeat of Nazi army and a beginning of counterattack of USSR. There are many questions concerning the reasons that caused a victory of USSR, some of them are pretty easy to figure out, but some are not that obvious. The one possible reason is propaganda and its influence on people. So, this investigation will go over all the supporting and objective arguments.

Before getting started with the research some clarification should be outlined. First of all, the types of propaganda must be identified. There are two core types identified in Rudolf Zultsman's book called "Propaganda as a weapon": Negative and Positive. Positive propaganda serves the role of an inspiration of masses, it encourages people to follow the message. Propagandists usually take heroes, victories, special events as the source for this type of propaganda. The second source is a good example of a positive propaganda. Then the negative propaganda raises hatred or disgust towards a particular thing, which the propaganda was devoted to. Propagandists usually take enemy leaders, nation, enemy religion or beliefs as the sources for negative propaganda. The first source is an example of the negative propaganda. Propaganda is spreading rumors, jokes, fake news or exaggeration of truth in the purpose of

persuading people. The USSR used propaganda all the time, especially posters as some part of soviet citizens still did not know how to read, but the message of the poster is usually easy to understand. Propagandists put posters everywhere: on streets, stations, schools and other places where a big number of people is usually present. USSR had the biggest territory of all countries, yet not all the territory was properly used, so Soviets always had a fear that someone can steal their land. Propagandists used this fear all the time to frighten citizens. Another essential reason of using propaganda was that life conditions of Soviet citizens were awful, one apartment could be inhabited by three-five families, people were starving and not educated properly. So, propagandists started blaming US and Europe into this, they were stating that without the current government the situation would be way worse. Propagandists were raising hatred towards the enemies and raising the patriotism among the population.

Finally, getting back to the main topic, the impact of propaganda should not be underestimated. Propaganda is a machine of manipulation of human mind. So, was propaganda significant during the battle of Stalingrad? It pretty much was! First of all, the propaganda posters were always printed on a propaganda newspaper called "Agitator notebook". The magazine was always on the battlefield; it had some jokes of offences about enemies, like the first source, or had info about great achievements of some individuals, like the second source. It was clear for government that the soldiers were needed to be motivated or basically manipulated. Propaganda imputed the idea of sacrificing their lives for the sake of motherland. Propaganda was always emphasizing how noble it is to fight against stronger enemy like on the second poster or basically sacrifice your life for motherland. And it actually worked, there were many cases when soldiers were blowing themselves with tanks¹ or walking on mine fields or covering shotguns by their body. When such sacrifice happen, propagandist immediately use it as an example of what USSR's soldiers should be proud of and what should they do as well. One of the most famous cases is the case of Alexander Matrosov who was a 19 years old boy who covered a machine gun by his body to let the rest of his group attack with no fear to be killed. There were movies, plays, books and monuments of him, all for the sake of popularizing the idea of turning of your instinct of self-preservation and sacrificing your life or otherwise enemies will win and kill your family. Battle for Stalingrad was not an exception for such cases. Many soldiers were just giving their lives away to win the battle, but would they do it without propaganda? Most likely no, the propaganda twisted their perspectives and overflowed their minds with heroism. After having a look at the numbers of ammunition, tanks and other war machinery it becomes more than obvious that USSR had no chances, but what USSR had was the human resource and a will to give it away to win the battle. It can be admitted that for the Soviet government citizens were just like ants, who could be sacrificed and then be replaced by another one. With this perspective the government was designing the propaganda posters like first and second sources that were later shown to Stalingrad's soldiers. So basically, propaganda was inspiring and frightening USSR's soldiers to fight without thinking of their own life making them alike berserks, so outnumbering and covering enemies by their bodies allowed Stalingrad protectors to overcome the advantage of Germany's war technology. Another way of use the propaganda was demoralizing enemy by broadcasting radio records of how poor the situation of Germany is or by throwing leaflets on the battlefield with the same information on it, this tactic was used not only by Soviets but by other countries that were participating in the war as well. In this perspective and followed by the sources the propaganda played one of the most significant roles in the victory of Soviet army in the Stalingrad battle.

¹ Information is taken from: "Immortal feats" / Comp.: A. P. Kovalenko, A. A. Sgibnev. - M.: Voenizdat, 1980. p. 330 - 346

However, there is an argument against this idea. This argument is basically other reason of USSR's victory in the battle. The major factor of Soviets victory was the mistake made by German commanders. The commanders decided to separate their forces and underestimated Stalingrad. This factor has nothing to do with Soviet propaganda what makes propaganda's impact less relevant. Germany was overestimating its power and basically made the mistake that lead in the loss of battle.

Concluding all the information above it becomes clear that propaganda was significant but not the most significant factor of USSR's victory in the Stalingrad battle.

Reflection:

This investigation opened me a new way of how history is assembled, and how historians analyze it. Despite the original sources I used some websites and a couple of books "Propaganda as a weapon" and "The birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization" both books were limited in terms of dated of publishing it as it happened 12 and 40 years after the end of the war and they both were interpretations of author's perspectives what could impact the content. I also faced challenges that historians face while analyzing the connections between the propaganda and the particular event. Understanding the culture of the nation was essential as well as it connects to the understanding the message of posters. Coming up with the conclusion was not that difficult as I was supposed to find the connection between propaganda and mass heroism and compare its impact with the mistake made by Germany. Also it became clear for me that historian should not consider his own opinion in describing an event unless he has to analyze it. The main challenge of my investigation was the assembling the main question as I had to connect propaganda to a particular event. Also I figured out that not all the perspectives of historians are equally valid and trustable as there are many factors to be considered. My investigation can be referred to many present cases what makes it in some understanding important and valuable; countries like North Korea still use the same types of propaganda. And I would like to end this investigation with a quote of Samuel Johnson "Patriotism is the last refuge for a scoundrel" where, in my opinion, the most important words are "last" and "scoundrel".

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